

**Five Community College Consortia in Eastern Washington
Final Report June 2002**

Submitted by Walla Walla Community College, Lead
Other colleges participating were Big Bend Community College, Yakima Valley Community College, Wenatchee Valley College and Columbia Basin College

Eastern Washington Agriculture / Food Processing Partnership Demonstration Grant

The Eastern Washington College Agriculture / Food Processing initiative began in July 2000 and concluded on June 30, 2002. Walla Walla Community College served as the coordinator and fiscal agent for a five college consortia beginning September 1, 2001 as part of the grant deliverable. The major focus of the five college initiative (WWCC, CBC, YVCC, WVC and BBCC) was (1) coordination and delivery of instructional services during the pilot training program for the food processing industry in Eastern Washington and (2) development of course sequences and curriculum responsive to the five areas identified for the Skills Gap phase of the project. Detailed planning for this phase of the project was completed during October-December, 2001.

Pilot Training Program

The objective of the pilot training program was to enhance the employability and job skills of incumbent and transitional workers employed or located within the five collaborating community college regions and workforce development council areas of Eastern Washington. The planning of the pilot training program involved the respective community colleges and WDCs in the five Eastern Washington regions.

The pilot training program involved a total of 97 incumbent and transitional workers who met the State of Washington's eligibility requirements for participation in training. Approximately 18 additional food processing workers in the Walla Walla area received training during the pilot program but were judged by the respective WDCs as not meeting program training eligibility requirements due to their failure to obtain a selective service number prior to age 26. The food processing industries directly supported training for this category of Hispanic workers. Incumbent and transitional workers were enrolled in courses of study including basic literacy and occupational skills, maintenance, electrical, refrigeration, and equipment operation. Instruction was provided by both the community colleges in Eastern Washington and Perry Technical Institute, a private technical college.

Each incumbent and transitional worker involved in the pilot training program completed an education and employability plan including: (1) current skills and experiences, (2) an occupational goal, and (3) skill training plan of action. In addition, pilot program participants were administered standardized tests (assessments defined in the skill gap model) consistent with the training in which they were engaged.

In addition, all pilot program participants were asked to view a video produced by the Northwest Food Processors Association titled "Partners in the Process." Seventy-nine NOCTI (National Occupational Competency Testing Institute) skill competency-based tests

were administered to pilot training program participants. **The seventy-three trainees completing the NOCTI Manufacturing Technology test received an average score of 46 percent versus the national average of 58 percent. The six trainees who completed the Electrical Maintenance Technology received an average score of 47 percent versus the national average of 57 percent.** NOCTI tests are written on a ninth grade reading level which challenged some incumbent and transitional worker trainees. Further, there are no Hispanic versions of the NOCTI job skills tests. These factors contributed to the low trainee scores recorded for those who completed NOCTI skill tests. The majority of trainees engaged in job skill training programs did successfully complete their respective training program in accordance with the training providers' standards. Walla Walla Community College served as the clearinghouse for ordering NOCTI tests administered by designated proctors at WWCC and the WDCs. Only the written version of the NOCTI job skills test were given to trainees due to timing and difficulty in administering the NOCTI practical job skills test available for each of the areas identified for each individuals skill gaps. By design, NOCTI job skills tests were only given to incumbent and transitional workers engaged in actual job skill training courses the related to an industry skill standard.

Curriculum Development

Each of the five community colleges were assigned one specific industry skill standard developed by industry as a basis for developing appropriate instructional program content. The five areas included: (1) Ammonia Refrigeration, (2) General Maintenance, (3) Electrical, (4) Equipment Operation and Maintenance, and (5) Basic Employability Skills. Course sequences, course outlines, and pre-post tests were developed for each of the five instructional program areas. These five sets of instructional program guides will be shared with the community colleges in Eastern Washington serving the training needs of their respective agriculture and food processing industry workers.

Suggestions for Assuring Training Program Sustainability

Some improvements could be realized in the planning and the conduct of this dimension of the overall Northwest Agriculture / Food Processing Partnership training project. The four specific steps that need to be taken to assure food processing industry training needs are met include:

1. The community colleges and WDCs need to work with the respective food processing industries and agricultural growers in their region for the purpose of developing organizational training plans specific to their needs for immediate and long term skill gaps. This level of planning for training should involve management, incumbent workers, and organized labor in its conceptualization of worker skill needs and how best to deliver training. Lead time for planning is critical to the success of closing identified skill gaps.
2. Employer and Hispanic employee personnel processing procedures need to be reviewed and amended to assure workers with legal residence status

have completed all INS and State of Washington requirements that will qualify them to participate in publicly supported training programs. Currently there is one set of requirements that qualify workers as legal employees and a second set of criteria for participation in training programs designed or supported by public funds.

3. Review the requirement for legal alien workers under age 26 to obtain a selective service number as a requirement for participation in publicly designed or supported training programs. Several of the incumbent workers selected by industry managers for skill training were determined by WDCs to be ineligible for the pilot training program due to the fact that they had not completed application for a selective service number. According to the WDCs, there is a requirement to apply for a SSN even if the male worker surpassed their 26th birthday which is a very cumbersome process. An effort needs to be made to alleviate or reduce this obstacle for training on behalf of employers and employees.
4. A concerted effort needs to be made to meet the basic workplace literacy and skill training needs of Hispanic workers in Eastern Washington. These workers represent the permanent “critical mass” of human capital upon which the food processing industry’s future is dependent. The State of Washington, the Washington Growers League, and the Northwest Food Processors Association should direct attention to this critical gap in job skills and wage progression for the growing permanent Hispanic worker population in the food processing industry.